

NEW YORK TIMES

APR 14 1966

FRANCE ASSERTS DOUBTS ON KHANH

Foreign Minister at SEATO
Meeting Maintains That
Saigon Can't Beat Reds

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Special to The New York Times

MANILA, April 13 — France challenged today the United States view that the South Vietnamese Government of Maj. Gen. Nguyen Khanh was capable of defeating the Communist Vietcong guerrillas.

Foreign Minister Maurice Couve de Murville contended that the Khanh Government was crippled by a lack of popular political support and national authority. He praised the United States contribution to Saigon's war effort, but expressed doubt that military victory could be achieved.

[Henry Cabot Lodge, United States Ambassador to South Vietnam, said in a magazine article that proposals for neutralizing South Vietnam were "woolly and deceptive."]

The French minister addressed a closed session of the Ministerial Council of the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization.

Earlier, Secretary of State Dean Rusk emphatically reaffirmed United States support of General Khanh and confidence that his Government could defeat the Communists.

Mr. Rusk asserted that Communist China and North Vietnam, as well as the Soviet Union, had disclaimed any interest in negotiating an agreement that would leave South Vietnam free to choose its own form of government.

The 10th annual council meeting of the eight-nation South-

East Asian alliance opened here this morning with a ceremonial

public session. The United States and France had hoped to avoid a public display of differences during the three-day meeting, but the policy rift was evident from the outset.

At the ceremonial opening, the Foreign Minister of Thailand, Thanat Kohman, unexpectedly made a thinly veiled denunciation of the proposal made last August by President de Gaullee that Southeast Asia be neutralized in agreement with Asian Communists.

Mr. Thanat implied that France should abandon that stand and contribute to the Southeast Asian alliance or leave it.

Mr. Couve de Murville listened glumly at Mr. Thanat said neutralization of Vietnam would be "tantamount to delivering that country with hands and feet bound to its northern aggressors."

The French diplomat, in his remarks, had suggested that the alliance "do away with myths, eliminate ambiguities and squarely face realities."

At the closed session later he advocated that a "political solution" be found for South Vietnam. He did not use the word neutralization, but French officials said later that he meant President de Gaulle's proposal.

Mr. Couve de Murville said that it had been with Southeast Asia in mind that his Government established diplomatic relations with Communist China last January. One aim, he said, is to divert Chinese Communist thought from imperialist expansion to internal development.

At the closed session Mr. Rusk, Mr. Couve de Murville, Prime Minister Keith J. Holyoake of New Zealand and Lord Carrington, the British delegate, were the first four speakers. Their statements were reported by authoritative sources. The delegation heads from Australia, The Philippines, Pakistan and Thailand are scheduled to make their opening statements tomorrow.

The French delegation has emphasized that Paris does not expect Peking will become receptive immediately to the neutralization proposal. The French Ambassador to Peking will go there with instructions to look into Chinese Communist attitudes and to seek areas of negotiations that may exist as a consequence China's ideological dispute with the Soviet Union.

The de Gaulle Government hopes meanwhile that the United States will continue its military support of the South Vietnamese Government.

Mr. Rusk told the council that the United States was satisfied with the way General Khanh had taken hold as Premier and

had demonstrated his concern with winning popular political support.

Mr. Rusk reported that there had been some deterioration in the South Vietnamese situation and that the Vietcong's improved capabilities had been shown in the number of United States helicopters brought down.

"With a little persuasion and a great deal of terror," he said, the Vietcong has been able to overrun large sections of the countryside, but he declared that that did not mean they were able to hold and control it.

The Secretary said the United States had rejected the idea of any retreat from South Vietnam and was committed to give every support to General Khanh. This does not preclude the possibility, Mr. Rusk added, that the war may be extended to North Vietnam, which he charged with directing supplying and providing leaders for the Vietcong's operations.

Lord Carrington affirmed Britain's support for the United States effort in South Vietnam. He said that Britain favored neutralism in those parts of

the world where it was a workable policy.

Prime Minister Holyoake complained of French plans to conduct nuclear tests in the South Pacific this year. New Zealand has been apprehensive about fallout from those tests.